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ABSTRACT

An Evergreen State College (WA) community outreach program was designed to serve the dual purposes of providing (1) needed English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction to Hispanic community members, and (2) teaching experience for students in a master's program in education. An ESL laboratory was established, about 25 undergraduate and graduate students and faculty volunteered as teachers, and 75 community members participated as students. Instructional strategies used included team teaching, student-centered and cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary instruction. A grant provided several professionally-developed ESL training sessions, and the 2-hour evening lab sessions were advertised by several channels. After initial success, the program was further expanded and has continued beyond the initial graduate student group's program length. A significant characteristic of the program is that it evolved and has continued without funding. It is also seen as successful for the positive way it has been received, the value of the teaching and learning experiences it has supported for both teachers and students, its community-building function, and the benefit to the community. Contains 46 references. (MSE)

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ESL TEACHING LAB PROJECT

Much activity in the educational community is focusing attention on students' needs, not only their academic development, but also positive ways in which they will develop as meaningful citizens in a changing society. New and restructured types of educational systems are evolving both in the public and in the private sector. Alternative schools are gaining in popularity as are other types of educational environments that concentrate on student centered learning. The array of schools, programs, institutions, projects, and learning centers is enormous. With educational opportunities emanating from every corner, the assumption should be that everyone is beginning to receive the service they require. In the acquisition of the English language for non native speakers, this is not necessarily the case.

There are public schools, community colleges, private institutions, refugee centers, and other related organizations that offer ESL instruction. People who are on refugee status, documented aliens, people with tuition money, and some children of non-native speakers of English who have entered the public school system are being helped to acquire the necessary language skills. There are still others who are unable to access the help they need. Some of these people cannot afford language instruction, do not know about available services because of insular separatism, are undocumented aliens, and others who cannot or wish not to participate in a conventional classroom, with conventional texts, and conventional curriculum. How are these people who are slipping through the cracks to receive assistance: from where, and from whom? A component of the Master in Teaching program, 1991-93, at The Evergreen State College (Evergreen) was created to study and answer this question.

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Our group began an open-ended dialogue to determine functions, logistics, goals, and actions. Some of the ideas we discussed were concerned with who would be helped--who are the potential students to target? Where would/could a class be held? How would the scheduling proceed? Should there be a curriculum? How would the teachers create learning communities? Would there be individual teaching or team teaching? How many levels of instruction would be necessary? How often would classes be held? How many hours would each teacher work? How would the teachers receive training or instruction in ESL methods?

Through extensive discussion, a two-fold plan emerged. Primarily, we focussed our attention on helping members of the Hispanic community to receive classes in ESL. Through investigation, we discovered that this particular group of people in our community were experiencing difficulty in obtaining English instruction. The other segment would provide a laboratory where student teachers had an opportunity to practice teaching from the theoretical lessons being studied within the master's program. The types of philosophies represented through this Master in Teaching (MIT) curriculum encompassed a broad range of topics from liberatory education, moving theory to pracitce, group work, to multicultural, ethnic, and gender issues, to democracy in education fostered by educators such as Dewey, Freire, Piaget, Plato, Paul, Addams, Rouseau, and others.

Fifteen Master in Teaching students were the original core of the program. Credits towards the master's degree were to be awarded those who participated. The requirements were to attend weekly seminar sessions to discuss aims and procedures, to learn how develop creative and relevant lessons, to teach at least two hours per week, to attend four scheduled ESL training sessions, and to present a paper to the MIT program/community concerning the activities in which each participated along with an evaluation of the learning and the product. One person was designated as the director of the program whose responsibilities included being the liaison between program and community, program and institution, decision making

about procedures, organization of project, and scheduling classes and facilities.

During the time that the program was in operation some real concerns became evident. First of all, and most important was the realization that a genuine need for this type of service did not exist within the greater community. There was no other place where a student could come to study for free and experience an open, non-threatening, liberatory environment. There was no other place a student could go and experience being taught by a team of teachers. There was no other place a student could go and be exposed to lessons that were truly relevant to their lives, free of stilted curriculum and texts. Secondly, could the possibility of an unfunded student created program continue? Thirdly, if the program did continue, how would an outreach to new prospective students be made? A fourth concern naturally to follow is that if the program will continue, who will teach and where?

The most obvious connection to pursue was a continuation through the Master in Teaching program at Evergreen. If the ESL lab could become an integral unit of the program, then a similar format to the above mentioned scenario could proceed on an uninterrupted basis. I went to the Director of the MIT Program to discuss this possibility. Even though the idea was well received, the guarantee of such a program would be an impossibility to ensure. The nature of academic programs at Evergreen is totally democratic. This means that a director cannot dictate necessarily how a program will run. This type of decision must be made through collaboration by all participating faculty as well. To make things even more complex, different faculty may cycle in or out of the program after various academic time segments. Even though one of the strands of the program supports the concept of multiculturalism, and the teaching of ESL to different ethnic groups certainly satisfies this demand, there was no way to guarantee that newly entering faculty would care to pursue this particular subject as the satisfaction to that requirement.

In our first year of development approximately 25 graduate students, undergraduate students, and members of the faculty volunteered their expertise as teachers. More than 75 people from the local community participated as students. The Lab was born from a concern and desire from a few graduate students and one faculty member from our master's program to create a connection between the college and the surrounding community. To bring concept into reality, fifteen of us formed a seminar group that designed a teaching lab in 1991. The Lab was designed to run for one quarter as a component of the Master in Teaching Program at The Evergreen State College in Olympia. The primary impetus in putting a lab experience together was to design an authentic environment where student teachers who were interested in providing a community service could practice teaching. We brainstormed a loose format modeled after the experimental structure of the college. The major components the group was interested in putting in place for this experience were team teaching, student centered and cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary strategies. The underlying principles were democracy and the concept of teacher/learner. A major concern of the designers was that a strong community connection could be developed through college and community participation in the lab. Although many student teachers were willing to go out into the local area to bring instruction to the people, the lab was set up on the college campus. This decision helped open the college environment to community members who otherwise might not ever set foot on campus. Evergreen invites interaction with the public, so the establishment of the lab built a serviceable bridge.

We separated into compatible teaching/learning teams and scheduled two hour classes to run each night of the week. We wrote a successful grant which provided us with funds to procure a number of professional ESL training sessions so we would be better prepared to work with our students. To interest potential student participants from the community we made our classes known through a number of channels: announcements posted in public places, networking with various community organizations, word of mouth, and announcements on the local public radio station

(which happened to run a program in Spanish, "El Mensaje del Aire"). Response was good; twenty people showed up the first night.

After experiencing the benefits of the Lab, graduate students from our program decided to develop the experiment further. We separated from the academic association with the master's program, solicited more graduate student volunteers (who were anxious to participate because of the opportunity to do some real teaching), wrote another successful grant, and continued the Lab. Classes continued through the following summer and into the next year as well. Even though we have now graduated from the college, the Lab continues to operate. We have encouraged graduate students from the next program cycle to continue the experiment. All who participate in The Lab bring a desire to learn and enjoy a non-threatening environment where students generate curriculum and build community.

We developed a non-traditional way of implementing and operating a program, namely with no money. It was totally developed through student initiative and energy and naivete (we had no idea this could not be done, so we just did it). Our project was sanctioned by faculty and administration, but there was no authoritative leadership or control imposed on the process from the institution. Unfortunately, this also meant there were no institutional funds to run or expand our creation. However, we developed our vision of a liberated program environment and we learned how to create a model of a unique learning system.

Buzz Words: Cooperative Learning; Critical Thinking, Team and Collaborative Teaching, Student Centered; Cross Cultural Awareness; Mutual Respect; Integrated Curriculum; Community; Peer Teaching; Self Evaluation . . .These current buzz words are descriptors of the new face of education that leads us into the 21st century. These words, not so coincidentally, also represent the elusively unstructured nature and philosophy of The Evergreen State College, including its administration, faculty, and students. We have been accommodating these ideas since the inception of the

college in 1967. As a total learning community functions within the paradigm that is Evergreen, an alchemical process develops that is more than the total of the buzz words by which we are recognized. It is not possible to predict all the potential outcomes possible when students take charge of their learning, except that learning, real learning and individual growth take place. Our practice in the Lab is manifested through the internalization of these ideas.

Cooperative Learning: When students are given the opportunity to work in concert with the group, learning is enhanced. The sense of belonging augments the positive attitude of the individual. When students are shown how to use the tools that make group work successful, there is the satisfaction of accomplishment. Through cooperative group work, there are more choices evident to students. When students can decide on directions their education will take and how the process will proceed, they are more likely to take charge of the learning. This leads to enthusiasm, interest, and engagement. Once individuals are helped through group process, they are more secure about doing the individual components of their work.

We regularly structured activities that required group interaction. Our focus took us away from filling in blanks on boring worksheets. Students had to generate ideas and communication from experience, in and out of the Lab, and put together segments of meaningful conversation that elicited a response from others. We structured in repitition through dictation, questioning, choral answering, and progressive lessons. The types of activites that we usually employed required that students converse, share, help and decide. There were no grades, although there always seemed to be an atmosphere of friendly competition among the students and concern for each other. We frequently mixed groups so that different students would have the opportunity to experience different personalities. Further, our Lab had a variety of levels of prior literacy and ethnic backgrounds. This provided extensive opportunities to use multi-level strategies in facilitating lessons. The range of activities covered grammatical construction, physical movement, art, games, excursions outside the classroom to

reality, and higher order thinking skills that required the use of evaluation, synthesis, and analysis.

Team Teaching: There are many advantages and few disadvantages in practicing team teaching. The disadvantages are connected to individuals with aggressive egos. Since cooperation is key to working together, those with immutable egos directing their personalities will inhibit the process of the group. This does not mean that those people cannot control their behaviors, but it becomes somewhat difficult for another cooperative team member to proceed for the good of the students while the aggressively egotistic person is learning the process of cooperation and accommodation. The obvious advantages are that greater attention can be given to individuals and more creativity can be enjoyed when designing and giving lessons. People tend to "spark" off other people. No one person has all the good ideas nd new thoughts are initiated from the interaction of the minds. The dynamics in the classroom are enhanced by the sheer conglomeration of more energy. There is more opportunity for students to be reached through a variety of presentations. There is adequate opportunity for more realistic modelling to be done with a team. Students gain a greater feeling of confidence as they see their teachers performing as human beings . . team members are more likely to run into inconsistencies with thought processes, and modelling how to work through the lapses in communication are powerful lessons for the students.

Not all teaming situations are compatable. Personalities and individual methods and aims are considerations for forming a team. Experience in these situations are one of the only ways to ensure that the participants will be able to have a successful collaboration. Team situations vary in intensity from those who plan together, those who teach as integral segments of a unit, to those who merely share a space. To be effective, a team situation must be interactive, open, and positive. Sometimes team members will facilitate only the parts of the activity/experience in which they have the greater expertise. This is not always the most beneficial method for the learning of

the students. Students generally tend to simulate the modeling of their teachers; if the teacher never has to struggle to accomplish a task, the students are robbed of the opportunity to see others work through difficulty to success. Only teams, through their own experience and which enjoy a truthful and interactive communication can make the kinds of procedural decisions they feel will most greatly enhance their students' learning.

The Concept of Teacher/Learner: In situations where participants in a learning environment are simultaneously or sequentially involved in the process of teaching as well as learning, there are more successful outcomes. Everyone knows that one of the best ways of leaning something is to teach it. When students are encouraged to teach what they know their grasp of the subject is enhanced. When peers tutor each other there is a sense of accomplishment that cannot be given by an instructor. Also, and most important, the teacher must be involved in the process of teaching and learning. The students should not be doing anything different than the teacher regarding the process of learning. If the teacher is not engaged in learning, the lessons soon become stale and stilted, and certainly less effective. It is important for the student to see and be aware of the teacher sharing his or her process and thinking. The esteem building and enhancement of mutual respect through the mind set of teacher/learner adds immeasurably to the success of the learning community.

Community Building: Providing situations where there is opportunity for people to help others is a positive step in establishing communication. Communication is the key that unlocks ignorance and bias and opens the door to establishing a sense of community. There are many levels of community involved in the process of the Lab. There is the peer community, the learning community, the college community, and the greater surrounding community. Through the interactive processes supported by the existence of the Lab, a genuine result of mutual respect is enjoyed. Enhancing the opportunities for communication in the Lab brought about a greater feeling of community responsibility and support.

There is a certain political responsibility in not segregating people from the greater community. There is an ethical benefit realized when the learning environment is an actual part of the community. The development and enhancement of individuals is, by association, augmenting the quality of the community. For this reason, an open interaction should be shared by the participants and the community. Sharing and commuication will address the situation of cultural differences and stimulate understanding and accommodation. This interaction is the cultural bridge that makes learning part of living.

No Cost: The creation of a no cost teaching/learning lab is unique in the administrative mindset. Certainly an instructional environment cannot be provided which will take care of all aspects of education. The Lab focuses its learning opportunities on those who will most benefit, namely students who are learning to be teachers and community members who are not provided education. There are many people in the greater community who ar not giving of themselves to the benefit of their area. In many cases, the culprit is inability to communicate because of language or cultural blocks. The Lab provides a stage where some hindrances can be ameliorated and also allows concerned members within the community who have something to give, a place to give it. This interactive process promotes change, in people and in their community. The changes are always beneficial: enhanced communication, understanding, respect, and growth.. The change is a self balancing process.

As we became absorbed into the process of our project, I realized that an ideal outcome would be to equip students with adequate tools and instill in them a desire to take charge of their learning. But further, for them to take back to the community a feeling of responsibility for continuing to promote, by example and deed, language or other skill acquisition. Through the development of self enhancement and self determination comes the growth of community enhancement .

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